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Conservation Commission looks for new growth

By Randy Petersen
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A portion of the \$4 million in state funds set aside to address Tar Creek Superfund issues will target remediation of areas that were once covered by chat piles.

The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and the Conservation Commission have signed an agreement to start a pilot remediation program in the Superfund site. Project goals include finding what type of remediation will work best on land that once housed tons of chat.

"This is a start and you have to start somewhere," said Mike Thralls, executive director of the Conservation Commission. In addition to finding new cover for former chat piles, the project could plug open mine shafts in the area.

"They will only plug it if its in the area they are working in," said Dennis Datin of the ODEQ.

If mines are plugged, Datin warned that the majority of the shafts found in the 40-square-mile Superfund site won't be addressed under the immediate plan.

"\$500,000 won't go very far," he said.

The Conservation Commission will provide labor, materials, equipment, subcontractors and the analysis of lab samples from the project.

The ODEQ will work with the state agency to establish work plans, schedules and cost estimates.

Funding for the project will come from the \$500,000 in state money — one-eighth of the state match the Legislature approved earlier this year — as well as future federal money that could be used to continue work.

Thralls said the Conservation Commission will meet with the Ottawa County Conservation District Board later this summer. While survey work will begin after sites are identified, he said actual remediation work is expected to begin later in the year. The project is expected to take two years to complete.

Scott Thompson, director of ODEQ's land protection division, said he is excited about the project because it will evaluate various remediation options.

"We will be doing some things that are noticeable, hopefully, but not in really large areas," he said. "We will look at what plants will grow and where any special techniques might be needed.

"The main thing is to do some thinking about what will work in the real world."

The Associated Press contributed to this article.